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ABSTRACT

This practicum, designed to improve positive experiences of at-risk preschoolers, involved the coaching of parents in regard to their interactions with their preschoolers. The goal of the practicum was to provide parents with tools that would help them enrich the home environment of their preschool children. Parents of preschoolers in Chapter 1 schools were invited to participate in the 12-week practicum, which met weekly for 2 1/2 hours at a school. The population came from a large urban school district where there were many young parents. Twelve parent improvement sessions were held, with each session covering a different aspect of parenting. Strategies and procedures used to accomplish practicum objectives included role playing, discussions, workshops, field trips, consultant visits, research, demonstrations, and incentives for involvement. Results showed that with assistance, parents could make changes in their parenting strategies and get different results from their children. Parents were willing to use suggestions and strategies if they were presented in a humanistic and nondegrading manner. (SH)

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Increasing Positive Experiences for "At-Risk" Preschoolers Through Coaching of Parent Interactions

by

Mary H. Jennings

Cluster 36

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1991

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Phyllis J. Hobson

Phyllis J. Hobson, Ph.D.

Director, Parental Involvement, Chapter 1

Title

Kenex Admin. Bldg., 5th + G Sts, S.E.

Address Washington, D.C. 20003

August 26, 1991

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Mary H. Jennings under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Aug. 30, 1991

Date of Final Approval of Report

Wm. W. Anderson

William W. Anderson, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Improving Positive Experiences for "At-Risk" Preschoolers Through Coaching of Parent Interactions, Jennings, Mary H., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Preschoolers/Parent Involvement/Parent Interactions/Self-Esteem/"At-Risk"Youngsters/ Parenting/Positive Parenting/Preschool Education/Reading Aloud.

This practicum was a three-month project designed to improve positive experiences of "at-risk" preschoolers through coaching of parent interactions. The goal was to provide parents with tools to assist them in enriching the home environment of their preschool children.

Parents of preschool children from Chapter I schools were invited to participate in this twelve-week practicum which met weekly for two and one-half hours at an identified school. The population came from a large urban school district where many young parents were involved.

Twelve parent improvement sessions were held with each session dealing with a different aspect of parenting: physical, social/emotional and intellectual development of children; time spent with the child; importance of reading aloud to the child; constructing teaching devices; dealing with problem behaviors; etc. Various strategies and procedures were used to accomplish the objectives including role-playing, discussions, Make-It-Take-It Workshops, field trips, consultant visits, research, demonstrations, and incentives for involvement. Data was collected before, during and after the practicum. Checklists, surveys, merchant letters and quizzes were developed by the writer. Feedback information was also collected.

The results of this practicum were significant. The goal and objectives were successfully reached and they were surpassed in most instances.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The work setting for this practicum is a metropolitan area of the eastern United States. The overall population, including the city officials, are predominately African American. Many areas of the city contain a concentration of low income individuals whose only source of income is public assistance or some other form of government assistance.

This practicum was conducted in a local public elementary school. The majority of the students in the school are African American. The population served include preschool, kindergarten, primary and intermediate children from low socioeconomic families. The school is staffed by a dedicated administration, teachers and other staff members who go beyond their responsibilities to promote successful experiences for the children. In addition, Chapter I offers a Stars Program for identified students in grades 1 - 6 who need extra assistance in reading and/or mathematics. This program is held daily after regular school hours from 3:15 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. This tutorial program is staffed by Chapter 1 teachers and educational aides from the school.

The neighborhood is in the inner city of this school district which is inundated with drug users and sellers, and families who lack cultural pride. Some small businesses are

located near the school. The parents, as well as the students, frequent these establishments and can be seen in the immediate area on a regular basis standing on the corner or engaging in idle activities.

An excessive amount of crime exists in the neighborhood. Inhabited with many single-family individuals, overcrowded conditions exists brought on by the large number of children and the extended family members who live in a two-bedroom apartment designed for use by two to three people. Crime in many instances involves drug dealers and users with disagreements over territories occur frequently, where in the city the number of violent deaths reached more than 400 in 1990 as reported by the local police authorities.

Chapter I asked this writer to provide a class on parenting skills for parents of preschool children. This class was to serve as an intervention to prevent children from becoming "at risk". The focus of the twelve-week program was parenting skills, personal development, and broadening experiences in working with the school, community and family. Classes met on Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. for the duration of the program. Fifteen parents of preschool children from several identified Chapter I schools participated.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the local city university. Numerous responsibilities in all the departments have been delineated to the writer. Courses such as "Strategies for Teaching the Young Child", have been taught to local early childhood education teachers from the local school districts. Another responsibility of the writer has been the supervision of student teachers in the Early and Middle Childhood Education Program where frequent trips were made to the local schools for observations, evaluations, and guidance. Corrective and remedial reading, as well as reading improvement are specialties for the writer who has taught both at the local university.

The writer is a former elementary school teacher who taught for seventeen years in the public school system. Twelve years were spent as a first grade teacher; five years involved working as a building resource teacher, which encompassed teaching and administrative responsibilities. The writer taught proposal writing at a local university and wrote many award-winning proposals which brought extra programs, funds, materials, and recognition to the students and the school. Staff development workshops were conducted throughout the city for the public school system teachers and educational and professional organizations.

As a recipient of many distinguished honors in the public school system, the writer extended the writer's professional growth and development. As a recipient of a $4,000 Cafritz Foundation Fellowship, the writer participated in the gifted and talented institute at the University of Connecticut and attended various educational conferences designed to keep educators abreast of the latest trends in education. As one of the first recipients of "The Superintendent's Incentive Awards for Teachers", the writer enjoyed a $500 grant to improve or expand the identified exemplary practices initiated in the writer's classroom.

The writer guided a group of students who entered the National Fair Housing Poster Contest sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For their first place national winning entry, the students received a $1,000 United States Savings Bond and the poster entitled "Different Families Make a Neighborhood" was displayed on the rear of 150 metrobuses in the city. The writer wrote a proposal and coordinated a project entitled "Catch the Winning Spirit" which involved the entire school in an effort to improve attendance, encourage achievement, and improve morale between parents, students, teachers, office staff, cafeteria staff, and the administration.

The writer's background and experience are comprehensive and include a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Business. A

Master of Science Degree with a concentration in Reading is a part of the educational background of the writer.

The writer is responsible for developing and administering a class on parenting skills for parents of preschool children. With the numerous years of experience working with students grade one through six and their parents, the writer has ample background to succeed with the mission of this project.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Many parents of young children are teen mothers who do not have time or the understanding to deal with their children. The teen mothers are in school attempting to complete their education and leave the young child's rearing to the grandmother or some other older adult in the family. These teen mothers are not mature enough to accept the responsibility of caring for a new life when they are still children themselves and enjoying the kinds of things children enjoy doing. They can be observed playing with the same kinds of toys that their children play with for fun. These young mothers become pregnant again and again before one child has grown enough to maintain a certain amount of independence for himself or herself.

The families promote the children watching television rather than reading a book aloud to them. Watching television does not require the time of an adult, and it is something that the entire family can do together. Most of the homes have several television sets which are placed in strategic places such as the living room, kitchen, and each bedroom. Many of the young mothers do not possess a high school education. They did not read well in school; many of

the parents can be classified as illiterate, since their ability to read, write and do math is below the fourth grade level. In some story books, the vocabulary used in the books may be too difficult to pronounce and comprehend.

The parents of the preschool youngsters are uninformed about the educational and cultural activities available free or for minimal fees for the children in the area. In addition, they do not know the importance of the exposure of children to new and varied activities to enhance their background of experience for learning. Since these parents are not avid readers, they do not know the kinds of things offered by magazines and newspapers. In addition, the books on childrearing practices are not used as guides for use with rearing their children.

The problem is that parents of "at risk" pupils lack the necessary skills and understandings to provide adequate positive experiences for their preschool youngsters. If the problem were solved, parents of "at risk" preschool youngsters would understand the needs of their youngsters in relationship to their developmental levels. They would use positive reinforcers when dealing with their children. In addition, they would understand the necessity of reading to their children and would enrich the home environment by providing and using materials with their children.

Problem Documentation

The existence of this problem was documented by the responses of 15 parents to a survey on child and parent activities. Five out of 15 parents indicated that they read aloud to their preschool child only once a month if at all for they felt the school took care of this need. Similarly, only five of the fifteen parents had taken their children to the library within the last six months. Many parents reported not having ample funds to purchase books or they stated that if they purchased books they would be destroyed by the children.

The purpose of discipline as seen by most of the parents was a means of punishment. When the youngsters misbehaved, 12 out of 15 parents spanked the child and yelled fiercely when their tempers had been worn thin through dealing constantly with the children. Many of the young mothers left disciplining up to the grandmother who assumed responsibility as the matriarch of the family. Some parents said the children did not respond unless one talked to them in a loud manner or spanked them. Most of the young mothers employed the discipline techniques used by the immediate family or others close to them.

Twelve out of 15 parents described the preschool as a place where the children spent the day playing under the supervision of a teacher. Children were described as not

doing "real work" since they were not using a pencil and paper. Parents recalled their beginning school years and the type of work they remembered doing with the use of pencils and numerous papers. They felt that their children should be doing the same kinds of things in their present preschool situations.

Fourteen out of 15 parents stated that their children asked too many questions, and that they did not have the time to talk or play with their children. The parents were alarmed by the number of questions the children asked and the fact that they insisted upon receiving answers. These same parents said that they told their children to go to sleep or to go and play with their friends.

Ten out of 15 parents responded that they thought it was "cute" when children were reprimanded and appeared to be bashful after the encounter. They did not feel that these kinds of experiences could have a detrimental effect on their children's future development.

Ten out of 15 parents indicated that all their children used the same kinds of books and materials to learn including third and fourth grade children. It was reported by the parents that usually the older brothers and sisters worked with the younger children because they enjoyed working with them. The parents suggested that this brother-sister working relationship gave them time to relax or complete chores around the house.

Twelve out of 15 parents reported that they did not have a library or educational games in the home. They cited their lack of funds for such projects and that the children would destroy the books and games rather than use them. They stated that television was available and it could be used by the entire family, rather than one or two children. A summary of the parent responses can been seen in Table 1.

Causal Analysis

One factor related to the cause of the dilemma is that for the most part theses parents are living in poverty and their only source of income is public assistance, social security benefits, etc. Many of the parents have more than one small child who is attending school. The families are headed by one individual who is unemployed. Horn (1990) reported that the Head Start families have an income of less than $6,000 annually, and that 54% are headed by a single parent. He added that more than half of the Head Start parents are not high school graduates. Living conditions are often traumatic with more than six people living in a two-bedroom apartment which was designed to accommodate three or four people.

Another factor related to the cause of the problem is that the young parents have low educational levels. Most of the parents do not have a high school education and are

unable to find jobs. In many instances, the family situation has repeated itself over several generations.

Another cause of the problem is that these parents are very young and inexperienced in the proper care of children. They are high school dropouts who became pregnant and had babies beginning at age thirteen or fourteen when they were in the midst of growing up. They left the childrearing up to the grandmother or other older adults in the family who often resort to corporal punishment. On the other hand, some of them use the same kind of discipline procedures used for them when they were growing up, such as spanking.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The writer's review of the literature revealed various concepts by researchers in the field of parent child relationships.

Elkind in Warger (1988) addresses the resistance to the developmentally appropriate curriculum as an opening wedge to its introduction at all levels in the educational process. Parents and educators, in many instances, do not recognize the vast amount of experience infants and young children have to reconstruct and the process by which they do the reconstructing. Hence, parents do not necessarily know what their children are capable of doing intellectually, socially, emotionally or physically. Many of the expectations are beyond the reach of the child's

developmental level. Behaviorists, on the other hand, measure objectives by one's ability to pass a test. The entire world has become so test oriented until many of the very basic accomplishments are overlooked.

Black and Puckett in Bredekamp (1990) add that parents want the best for their children and will often pressure teachers into using inappropriate practices. Parents recall their early primary experiences beginning with grades second and third and expect their preschool children to perform at this level forgetting about the age differential. Parents who work often feel guilty from having to leave their children during the day or evening, but they are contented knowing their children are getting what is called "real work" with a pencil and paper and what the parents feel is a good education. In addition, some of the parents measure their worth by their children's accomplishments.

Williams (1985) states the causes of misbehavior is often the results of a low self- concept in a child which can be influenced by parental interactions. The object should be to strengthen the self-concept; however, it is not treated in this manner by many parents of "at risk " youngsters. These young parents often interpret discipline as punishment when it should be designed to foster good self-concepts and healthy consciences.

Williams further states that reading aloud builds curiosity on behalf of the child, while it brings about a

closeness in the interactions with the adult and the child. The parents should serve as the intermediary between the child and the author. When parents do not have time for his necessary activity, the child can be robbed of a prerequisite to successful learning in school.

Hilliard (1988) clarifies the definition of the "at risk" child, from that conceived by many as a child with specific mental deficiencies. Many people see the child not only as deficient in achievement but in his/her capacity to achieve. He states further that the cause of the deficiency in most cases is due to lack of access to proper instruction due to poverty or status in a minority group.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was to provide parents with tools to assist them in providing an enriched environment for their preschool children where they could experience success. All parents want the best for their children; however, many times they do not understand or know what research says about child rearing practices. As a result, these young parents resort to patterns established by parents, relatives or friends as a means of rearing their children. It was the ultimate desire to equip these preschool parents with ways of dealing with their children in order to prevent possible problems from occurring later in the child's life.

Performance Objectives

The following objectives were projected for this practicum:

Objective 1 : By the end of the 12 week implementation period, ten out of 15 parents would report orally on a weekly basis that they had spent at least three 15 minute intervals engaged in at least five of the identified activities with their preschool child as measured by the record of active interactions.

Objective 2: Based on 15 minute intervals, ten out of 15 parents would report orally on a day-by-day basis that they read aloud to their preschool child at least three times per week based on 15-minute intervals as measured by the form for reporting reading aloud activities.

Objective 3: During the three-month implementation, at least ten out of 15 parents would sort randomly selected phrases describing positive, negative, and indifferent comments into their correct category with 90% accuracy as measured by the form developed for promoting positive interactions between the parent and the preschool child.

Objective 4: During the three-month implementation, at least ten out of 15 parents would make at least three visits to the library, bookstore, or museum where she/he selected materials that her/his child would enjoy as evidenced by oral self reporting on a weekly basis as measured by the form for recording library/museum visits.

Objective 5: During the three-month implementation, at least ten out of 15 parents would identify basic developmental characteristics of their preschool children by correctly choosing these from among a list of 20 descriptive phrases with 90% accuracy.

Measurement of Objectives

The measurement of the five objectives was done by five evaluation sheets (see Appendices B - F). These sheets were

designed by the writer. Evaluation sheets for Objectives 1, 2, and 4 were ongoing and were used on a weekly basis for parent reporting and observation. Evaluation sheets for Objectives 3 and 5 were used at the completion of the implementation period. The results of the initial survey served as the pretest instrument (see Table 1).

Objective 1 was measured by the use of a chart designed by the writer (see Appendix B). This chart allowed the parent to orally report on a weekly basis activities between parent and child in seven areas: play, positive strokes, scribbling, painting, talking, presenting new ideas and questions. Time was reported in 15-minute intervals on a weekly basis, during the 20-minute period at the beginning of the session. Success was measured by ten out of 15 parents performing these tasks at least three fifteen-minute intervals in at least four of the areas.

Objective 2 was measured by the oral reporting of parents on a weekly basis that they read aloud to their children. Reporting continued for the duration of the project. Responses were recorded by the writer during the final 15 minutes of the session while parents were in a circle. Success was measured by ten out of 15 parents reading aloud at least three times per week by the end of the implementation period.

Objective 3 was measured by an individual written examination constructed and administered by the writer (see

Appendix D). It required parents to correctly sort 20 comments, possibly used with their children, into three categories: positive, negative, and indifferent. Success was measured by at least ten out of 15 parents performing the task with 90% accuracy. This test was administered at the end of the implementation period.

Objective 4 was measured by a form constructed by the writer for reporting library/museum visits on a weekly basis. Parents were identified by numbers for expediency. Success was measured by ten out of 15 parents visiting the library, book store or museum for at least three times during the duration of the program. The writer recorded oral responses on a weekly basis (see Appendix E).

Objective 5 was measured by a written examination constructed and administered by the writer. The examination required parents to identify basic developmental characteristics of their preschool youngster by choosing these from among a list of 20 phrases. Success was measured by 10 out of 15 parents correctly completing the exercise with 90% accuracy. The devise was administered at the end of the eleventh week of the program (see Appendix F).

A log was kept during the three-month implementation period to record any unexpected events that occurred which would inhibit the success of the implementation (see Appendix G). There were not any significant events.

Description of Plans for Analyzing Results

Tables were used to present and to analyze results to determine whether or not the objectives were achieved. The tables present data to indicate the level of success or failure for each objective.

CHAPTER IV

Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The problem for this practicum is that many parents of preschool youngsters lack skills and understandings to provide positive environments which would contribute to their youngster's success in school. Berger (1987) in a historical review of parent involvement reminds the writer of Pestalozzi who can be identified as the "Father of Parent Education." Pestalozzi, who was reared by his mother and a nurse after the death of his father at age five, accompanied his grandfather on pastoral calls and witnessed the poverty suffered by the poor. The early experiences of this modern theorist led him to stress the necessity of parents to be involved in the education of their children.

D'Angelo, D. and Adler, C.R. (1991, p. 72) speak of variables which may cause or interfere with communication with parents are things such as their literacy level; language used for speaking, writing, listening, their other responsibilities; and the level of comfort in involvement. Schools must use techniques to find out how and when they can reach parents. Strategies suggested included writing in a form which could be easily understood by the parent when correspondence was prepared for them to read and presenting

incentives such as light snacks, entertainment, or awards in order to heighten their level of participation.

Comer (1988, p.78) alludes that many parents who are educated read to their children and this is a time when the child has the adult to himself or herself. The researcher refers to it as a "positively charged period". Children want to hear the same stories over and over for they meet many of the psycho-emotional needs of the youngsters. Children observe parents reading from top down and from left to right. They share in the excitement generated from the reading act. These acts encompass the prereading skills. Children who have been exposed to having an adult read to him goes to school ready to learn to read.

Comer states further that children who go to school with a vast number of experiences are more confident and the confidence is constantly reinforced by the accepting teacher. Children who lack these positive experiences and opportunities are often seen as lacking ability to learn by those persons who do not understand child development. The latter children are treated differently from their counterparts.

The Commission on Reading (1985, p. 24) cites reading aloud to children as one of the most important activities for building knowledge for success in reading. The child benefits greatest when he/she is an active participant, discussing the stories, defining word meanings,

and identifying words and letters in the selection. Relating the story to real life situations with appropriate questions asked is recommended over asking questions requiring simple recall.

The Commission on Reading supports further that learning to write supports reading development. The natural desire of the young child to communicate is a motivator for using the written language. An investigation reported that successful readers who entered first grade were children who had a lot of experience using paper and pencil. Writing for the young child can be using plastic or metal letters on felt or magnetic boards, without overemphasizing handwriting practice.

Several recommendations for parents were made by the Commission on Reading including reading to the child and teaching them about reading and writing and supporting school-age children's growth as readers. Support can be given by monitoring progress, buying the child books and taking him to the library, encouraging leisure reading and placing limits on the amount of with spent watching television in excess of ten hours per week.

Reed (1990) suggests focusing on positive verbal communication with the child and including the use of humor and avoiding negative terms. Reed advocates that the time spent communicating with a child has a strong bearing on the child's feelings of self worth. Active listening and

speaking are suggested. Active listening involves turning off the television, putting down the newspaper and giving the child undivided attention. Giving verbal feedback as asking for clarification or reflecting on what he has said is a signal of active listening. This makes the child feel he has said something that is important.

Problem solving situations are identified as excellent for active listening. The following suggestions were given:

- Get your child's advice and try to use some of the things suggested. Praise the child for his/her ideas.
- Ask your child what he would fix for dinner. Use some of his/her suggestions. Praise the child for the recommendations.

Reed states further that the "do as I say, not as I do" inconsistency between words and actions present conflict and the child doesn't know what to say or how to act. Parents serve as role models and must present clear pictures to their children. Communication researchers think you cannot prevent communication. Nonverbals often say more than words: eyes, face, voice and gestures. Positive communication enhances the desire to learn and helps children develop confidence in their ability.

Ilg in Shuman (1979) states that basic characteristics of children as related to books are as follows: age 2 1/2 - enjoy tiny things; 2 - 3 years - a deep interest in stories

told or read to them; 3 1/2 years - memorize stories or nursery rhymes. It is suggested to change one key word to see if the child recognized the change. Further Ilg adds that reading aloud to a young child helps build up a repertoire of sight words based on the beginning letter and the story.

In 1975, Morrison (1978, p. 2) talked about unusual "teacher power" if used effectively and resourcefully. He examined programs for parents highlighting the fact that these programs have been in existence for years and years. Programs that have made a significant impact on parent involvement that have stood the "test of time" are the (1) 4 H Clubs, (2) Educational Resources Services, (3) Environmental and Agricultural Programs, and the more recent, (4) Community Development Programs. Earlier views support the idea that parents make a difference and that family involvement is a much needed entity in the formal and informal development of children. Morrison informs the researcher of political policies and processes that have direct relationships ont he need for parent involvement as (1) student unrest of the 60's and 70's, (2) Civil Rights Acts and Marches, (3) A change in consumerism where parents are activists in making decisions and (4) New community service programs instituted during the Kennedy and Johnson eras. Various title grants as Title I, IB, IV-C, V and VII all relate to educational movements for program development

and training which enhance parental and child success in education. The author stipulates several justifications for parent involvement. Listed below are some of the factors:

1. To give greater importance to the parent and parent role.
2. To support greater self-concepts in the child and the parent.
3. To build parental knowledge bases and improve feelings about the schools.
4. To teach parents to reinforce skills at home.
5. To place parents as paid educational support personnel, hence improving their revenue base.

Parent meetings, classroom visits, PTA's and other qualitative programs are a part of the parent-teacher-child scenarios for building greater interrelationships.

Hutt, Tyler, Hutt, and Christopherson (1989, p. 3) presented an interesting report of Margaret Thatcher's "White Paper Education" program which showed the need for public monies for children to be educated on the preschool level up to the secondary school level. The report requested provisions in nursery schools from 9:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. for children three to five years of age in cases where parents were not fully educated or have special needs. Special emphasis was placed upon responsibilities and qualifications of the staff with relationship to learning through language and fantasy play.

Hildebrand (1975, p. 5) in a resourceful way discusses the humanistic needs of children where good health and good parenting develop good partnerships. Goal setting is essential in developing this interrelatedness. Hildebrand states further that teacher resources are essential entities for promoting understanding of the curriculum for parents and volunteers as well. The teacher in personalizing and individualizing instruction can workout a parent program to reinforce teacher-taught skills. Laboratory schools at universities are researching and designing play and socio-dramatic techniques for children who need more enriched learning environments. Parents are invited to review materials and observe teaching. Workshops are organized through appropriate university personnel focusing on application of real-to-life programs in guiding preschoolers to excel. Behavior patterns are presented, diagnosed, and treated in research studies.

Topping (1986) elaborates on the impact parents make on a child's education: a greater force than any other force. In Europe, being a parent educator is commonplace. Parents for years have played a significant role in the learning process; however, the author feels that the schools have literally "robbed" the parents of their responsibilities. The author gives an in depth presentation of the history of parent involvement in various countries comparing this to involvement of parents in America. He further believes that

parents should play a lesser role, but a positive on the child's academic pursuit, having less control and structure. Extreme and over-excessive involvement is the trend, but may not be as successful as a curriculum that is supported by reinforcement at home or a "home based" design.

Gough (1991) reiterates that parent involvement programs must not be limited to encouraging parents to read to their children, but they must focus on sharing effective parenting skills and techniques that they can use to help their youngsters learn.

Ylisela (1990) addresses Project Giant Step located in New york City where impressive results in education of 4-year olds have been achieved as a result of focusing on three critical area of child development: parent involvement, training, and cooperative bureaucracies. Parent rooms were established in the school where parents meet,to talk over problems with a social worker, and even to take classes. Many of the parents remain all day when they bring their younger children; other parents volunteer at the school. Many workshops in the following areas are held for parents: health, nutrition, food shopping, security. In addition, classes are offered in child development or English as a Second Language.

Schickedanz, York, Stewart, and White (1990) suggest reporting the young child's progress face-to-face to the parents to encourage support of the child and the

educational program. Reporting progress face-to-face allows for parents to ask questions concerning points they do not understand. It can establish greater communications between the parent and the teacher.

Smilansky and Shefatya (1990. p. 49) relate their interest and introduction to a concept of sociodramatic play while in Israel working with researchers on an approach that would help children of undereducated parents develop their cognitive skills. These children responded differently from children whose parents were from "higher socioeconomic backgrounds." The authors describe behaviors preschoolers display during a period of exploration:

1. Constructive Play - which includes the creative nature of the learner.
2. Functional Play - which involves sensory-motor skills.
3. Games and Rules - incorporate table and physical games.
4. Dramatic Play - where the child interacts with his total environment from a social setting. The authors describe the highest form as sociodramatic play, person oriented, play where the child becomes a performer, a looker-over, and an involved individual all at once. Sociodramatic play along with positive behavior an reinforcers

support one's cognitive development and rapid learning of skills in mathematics and reading.

As children learn to imitate their parents, they can grow and develop as they learn to respond to positive reinforcers. General and specific learning experiences were made through real and then imaginative play. Play-tutoring, music tutoring and use of toys were presented as specialized techniques for presenting skills that promote cognitive, socio-emotional and academic development of preschoolers.

Williams (1985) indicates that self-esteem is not related to those entities that place individuals into different social classes such as the amount of money or belongings one has, or the amount of education or the social interaction enjoyed by the family. Williams states the self- concept is learned based upon the perception that one has of himself/herself. Various self-esteem building activities are recommended such as responding to each child by name and giving recognition for all accomplishments.

Innes(1990) reports on a project where she taught a parenting course to parents of children ages 3-14 years of age. She speaks of the many options that are available to children and adults which can make changes in parenting styles. The author suggests three possible ways of dealing with inappropriate behavior with children: (1) ignore the behavior, (2) redirect the child away from the situation, (3) have the child stop everything for a few minutes. These

options are very helpful suggestions to avoid dealing violently with behaviors presented by children.

Description and Justification for Solution Selected

Several solution strategies were recommended by the literature to provide insight into developing of parenting skills and understandings in parents of "at risk" youngsters. The writer selected the following strategies based on the literature and the writer's experience in previous workshop presentations and teaching experiences.

1. Role playing using other parents in roles as preschoolers was utilized.
2. Making and collecting items for use in teaching the child at home was used to formulate a "Make-It-Take-It" workshop.
3. Notebooks and scrapbooks were kept by the parents which included their collection of parenting activities and photographs.
4. Bulletin boards and wall space summarized the current activities of the group. In addition, board space displayed basic concepts studied by the group.

5. Field trips to the public library for parents to obtain library cards/books for their children were taken.
6. Local radio personalities are involved with working with students on self-concepts were invited to speak and work with the parents concerning their children.
7. Incentives were given to parents who remained in the program and who performed in an outstanding manner. Donations were solicited from local merchants such as Pizza Hut, Murph's Restaurant, McDonald's, People's Drug Stores, etc.

Other ideas generated by the writer included having items that appealed to children available for up to five parents to take home weekly so that they could use them with their children and return them the following week. Many experiences for building self-esteem in the parents were presented so this could carry over to their children. Many positive strokes were exchanged. Eye contact and body language were emphasized in positive ways. Total active involvement was the goal for the entire group.

Report of Action Taken

There were six steps toward achieving the goal of this practicum. Step one entailed the writer compiling a handbook on appropriate practices and activities for preschool children to be used as a handout with the parents.

Step two involved scheduling the guest presenters and arranging the field trips to the public library. Guest presenters were asked to speak on the topic "Self-esteem."

Step three involved sending letters to local merchants asking their support for the project by donating incentives for attendance, total involvement, motivation, and books to be read to the children.

Step four involved finalizing the lessons for each week for use with the parents of the preschoolers.

Step five involved using the newly formulated lessons/activities with the parents.

Step six and the final step was the analysis and preparation of the data collected. Tables were designed by the writer to record data and present the outcome of the practicum.

The duration of the practicum was twelve weeks. The time was spent with the time divided as follows:

Three weeks prior to implementation consisted of recruiting parents to participate in the program by the Chapter 1 Office and the writer.

Two weeks prior to the implementation of the practicum consisted of a search for materials, contacting guests, making room arrangements and securing incentives from local merchants.

One week prior to the implementation of the practicum consisted of formulating lessons and arranging outside experiences.

The official weeks of the practicum involved teaching lessons based on the weekly themes using a variety of techniques: lecture, cooperative learning, whole language instruction, field trips, and "Make-It-Take-It" workshops.

Week one was devoted to administering the survey on activities parents spent with their children, administering an Interest Inventory, identifying special talents. Pictures were taken of parents and displayed on a bulletin board in the room. The chairs in the room were set up in a horseshoe shape to promote greater interaction. This week was entitled "Getting to Know You".

Week two involved teaching parents different ways to involve their children in reading. Questioning skills were addressed along with the kinds of materials to be used. Newspapers and magazines were used, as well as story books for children. In week three parents were taught ways to build and encourage self-esteem in their children. They were encouraged to allow children to take responsibility for their actions. Answering children's questions was

addressed. During week four parents were taught to use positive expressions more frequently. Role playing was utilized as a mechanism for teaching and learning.

During weeks five and six parents were taught the characteristics of preschool youngsters: physical, social and cognitive. A brainstorming technique was used. Parents were assigned leadership roles as: group leader, recorder and reporter. Weeks seven and eight focused on how children learn. The role of play, scribbling, etc. were addressed. During week nine, parents went on a field trip to a local public library to secure a library card and explore the world of books for young children. In week 10 parents identified and selected materials for their children while visiting a local library. In week 11, a guest speaker explored parenting and increasing self-esteem. Week 12 of the practicum involved completing the final evaluation sheets and tabulating the results. A luncheon was held for parents and their preschool children. Sets of "Lego" were presented to each parent participant for their child.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

The problem that existed in this writer's work setting was that parents of preschool youngsters lacked skills and understandings to provide adequate positive experiences for their preschool youngsters. The problem existed because many parents are young and inexperienced and unfamiliar with parenting techniques except those engaged by their parents and other family members. In essence, these young parents adapt techniques which they have observed that are often negative in nature.

The solution to the problems were multifaceted which involved oral reporting, discussions, role playing, constructing learning devices, demonstrations, observations, and field trips. Each parent completed a registration form and an entrance survey. The registration form provided basic information relative to family composition and background. The entrance survey supplied relevant information on parenting and school perception.

The goals of this practicum were to provide parents of "at risk" preschoolers with tools to help their children experience success at home, in school, and in the community.

Positive child rearing practices as outlined by research were stressed.

Specific objectives were designed to achieve these goals. The five objectives utilized and the results related to the objectives are delineated below.

Objective 1: It was projected that during the three-month implementation period, 10 out of 15 parents would report orally on a weekly basis that they spent at least three 15-minute intervals engaged with at least five of the identified activities with their preschool children as measured by the record of active interactions between parent and child (see Appendix B). Table 1 gives a comparison of the incoming interaction as compared to interaction after the interaction strategies. Results for this objective show a tremendous increase of interactions from the project to the final level of participation. Providing parent participants with real life situations, in a comfortable setting encouraged them to express themselves and participate freely in demonstrations and discussions. The toys and games that parents took home promoted greater exchange of ideas within the family. Parents spoke of play as having a greater dimension after their involvement in the parenting program. They were more observant of parent and child activities and constantly incorporated suggestions presented in the parenting class.

Table 1

Comparison of Active Interactions Between Parent and Child

Activity	Week 1	Week 12
Play	2	15
Positive Strokes	5	15
Scribbling	4	10
Painting	0	9
Talking	3	15
New Ideas	4	13
Questions	6	15

Objective 2: It was projected that during the three-month implementation period that based on fifteen-minute intervals, 10 out of 15 parents would read aloud to their child at least three times per week as measured on the form for reporting read aloud activities (see Appendix C). Table 2 shows a comparison of read aloud activities prior to the intervention and at the end of the intervention period. Parents reported having enjoyed reading aloud books to their children, even if they were repeats as long as the children requested the books. They understood this characteristic of young children after the class discussions. Supplying the parents with interesting children's books to take home and

read to their children and to return to the class and share the results promoted greater interaction. The children waited patiently each week for the parent to go to school and return with a book or some other educational activity. Parents reported that the children asked them if they were going to school several times per week. Parents shared what they did with the children. Also, each week one parent who had a female child was able to take "Dorothy" home for her child to hold while listening to the story. Parents with male children were able to take "Misty" home for use with their children. "Dorothy" is a beautiful African-American doll who is dressed in patriotic colors. "Misty" is a cuddly poodle dog that is black with very inviting eyes and features. Parents were free to take either of the items home if they wanted to take it. Parents named the toys, too.

Table 2

Comparison of Read Aloud Activities By Parents of Preschoolers

Reading Time	Week 1	Week 12
3 times per Week	5	13
Less than 3 times per Week	6	2
None	4	0

Objective 3: During the three-month implementation period, 10 out of 15 parents would sort phrases describing positive, negative, and indifferent comments into categories with 90% accuracy as measured by the form developed for promoting positive interactions between the parent and the preschool child (see Appendix D). Table 3 presents a summary of the classifying comments.

Table 3

Summary of Test Results of Parent Comments

No of Parents	Items Correct	% Score
2	19	95
12	18	90
3	17	85

Twenty items were on the test.

Objective 4: It was foreseen that during the implementation period, 10 out of 15 parents would make at least three visits to the library, book store, or museum where he/she would select materials that the child would enjoy as evidenced by the oral self reporting on a weekly basis as measured by the form for recording library museum visits (see Appendix E). Table 4 summarizes the results of this objective and shows that the objective was met.

Table 4

Summary of Library/Museum/Bookstore Visits to Select Materials

Parent Participants	Visits Reported
11	3+
2	2
2	1
0	0

Objective 5: It was predicted that at lease 10 out of 15 parents would identify basic developmental characteristics of their preschool children by correctly choosing these from a list of 20 descriptive phrases (see appendix F). All of the parents passed this assessment with 100% accuracy indicating complete mastery of the objective.

Discussion

To determine the effectiveness of this practicum, evidence from many sources was examined.

Table 1 reveals that the objective of 10 out of 15 parents performing in five categories was superseded by performance in six categories. Four categories: Play, Positive Strokes, Talking and Questions revealed a perfect score by all parent participants. Parents are interested in

the welfare of their children; however, many times they are reluctant to participate in specific activities due to lack of knowledge of the value to their children. Coaching the activities of the parents in a non-threatening atmosphere encouraged the parents to get involved.

Table 2 summarizes the reports of parents who read aloud to their children at least three times per week. An alarming number of 13 of the parents reported reading to their children and enjoying it. They reported that they were comfortable in knowing the proper techniques for reading aloud. Even the children responded in a more positive manner with the new techniques. Having a display of interesting and exciting children's books on hand, as well as lists of children's books were attention getters for the parents. Providing books for the parents to take home and return and share the results were a plus to meeting the objectives of the project.

Table 3 - All parent participants were administered the test where they were to place 20 descriptive comments made to preschoolers into three categories: "P" in front of positive comments, "N" in front of negative comments, and "I" in front of indifferent comments. The objective was accomplished since 14 of the 15 parents correctly identified 90% or more of the phrases. Of this group two parents missed only one. Only one parent who scored 85% failed to meet the objective requirement of 90% accuracy.

Parents want to do the right things for and with their children. Many times they are not aware of the impact of negative comments to young minds. The impact of negative comments and actions were explored in depth. Examples were given in how the positive self-concept could be damaged or destroyed. Various interpretations of speech and words led the parents to see that children may interpret what they say very differently from what the parents really mean.

Table 4 revealed that of the 15 parent participants, all of them experienced at least one visit to a library, museum or book store to secure books. The objective was met in that eleven of the parents or 73% of the parents participated in one of the above at least three times during the implementation period. The high success rate can be attributed to the high level of enthusiasm that existed in the classroom with the parents. Parents established a routine with the children and children constantly inquired about the parent going to class and to the library to secure books or other educational materials.

Table 5 clearly delineates that the entire group of 15 parents correctly identified the characteristics which described a typical preschool child in the following areas: physical age social/emotional age, and cognitive age. Interest contributed greatly to accomplishing this objective. The parents wanted to know what their children were capable of doing. They were encouraged to include

their children in planning in the household and to make sure that each child had responsibilities depending upon the level of development. The general characteristics of children of different age levels were discussed so that parents would know that a particular behavior was not out of line for an age level.

On the very last day of the implementation period, participants were asked to evaluate orally the class. Remarks given were as follows: "My child and I play more together". "I used to feel preschool children were just passing the time away when they were playing". " Playing with my child is different after taking this course. I discovered that it does not have to be planned." "The strategy of ignoring the child really works when dealing with temper tantrums as long as one knows the child has no other need." "I hope this class can be taught in our apartment complex community room so that many other parents can participate and gain from the experience."

A review and interpretation of the data confirm that the goals were achieved and that performance on the objectives was higher than expected in most instances. The results confirmed the writer's expectations that with assistance parents could make changes in the parenting strategies and get different results from their children. The receptiveness to the positive techniques showed that

lack of alternatives were the reasons for their previous behaviors in dealing with their children.

Based on the results of this practicum, the writer concludes that with proper guidance and assistance in parenting skills, parents can make a dramatic difference in the successes of their preschool children. The writer further concludes that parents are willing to use suggestions and strategies if they are presented in a humanistic and non-degrading manner.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that parents of "at risk" preschoolers are required to attend a series of parenting classes as a prerequisite to receiving government subsidies.
2. It is recommended that each school establish a series of preschool parenting classes and offer incentives for attendance.
3. It is recommended that each elementary school include in each PTA Meeting a period devoted to parenting skills which targets a particular developmental level of the child.

Dissemination

This practicum has been shared with, and made available to the university and school faculty.

The writer has shared the practicum with administrators in the Chapter 1 Program.

The writer used portions of the practicum in a course for parents at a local university.

The writer will share the practicum with principals from other elementary schools.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT SURVEY SHEET

AND

REGISTRATION FORM

PRESCHOOL PARENT SURVEY

Answer the following questions by placing a check ____ in front of the part that applies to you and your child. Check only one for each statement.

1. I read to my child
   ___ once a day
   ___ once a week
   ___ once a month
   ___ now and then

2. My child and I watch T.V. together
   ___ once a day
   ___ once a week
   ____ several times a month
   ____ all afternoon and evening

3. My friends feel that preschool is
   ___ a waste of time
   ___ play with no purpose
   ___ working all day with the teacher
   ___ activities with small groups of children

4. When my child arrives from school, the first thing we do is:
   ___ watch T.V.
   ___ talk about school experiences
   ___ go for a walk
   _____ take a nap

5. When I visit the school, I expect to see:
   ___ child with a pencil and paper
   ___ children working together
   ____ children reading a book
   ____ children singing songs and playing.

6. I take my child to the library:
   ___ once a week
   ___ once a month
   ____ several times a year
   ____ once in a while

7. When my child misbehaves, I will
   ___ stop the behavior and explain the reason
   ___ spank the child
   ____ spank and yell
   ____ say "Stop" and "Because I said so!"

8. The work that my child does at school is:
   ____ too easy
   ____ too hard
   ____ just right
   ____ could be better

9. Compared to what I could do when I was my child's age, he/she is
   ____ smarter
   ____ about the same as I was
   ____ not as smart
   _____ undecided

10. The things that I would like to change in my child and I are:
    Child: 1. 2. 3. 4.
    Parent: 1. 2. 3. 4.

PARENT REGISTRATION FORM

CLASS: Parenting Skills for Preschool Parents Date: _____

PLEASE PRINT

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Employer: _____

SCHOOL THAT CHILDREN ATTEND _____

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN YOUR FAMILY _____

AGE	BOYS	GIRLS
___	___	___
___	___	___
___	___	___
___	___	___
___	___	___

Do You have a current public library card? Yes No

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

High School Graduate? Yes No Year _____

GED Yes No Year _____

Highest grade completed? _____ Year _____

WORK EXPERIENCE

Are you currently employed? Yes No

If yes, type of employment _____

Employer _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Talents

Hobbies

Interests

APPENDIX B

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

Parent # _____ Objective # 1

ACTIVE INTERACTING BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

By the end of the 12 week implementation period, at least 10 out of 15 parents will report orally on a weekly basis that they spent at least 3 fifteen minute intervals engaged in at least five of the identified activities with their preschool children.

DIRECTIONS: Place a check by the activity underneath the correct week for each fifteen minute length of time spent with your child as described in the category.

	WEEK OF INVOLVEMENT												
ACTIVITY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
PLAY .getting toys, clothing, games .throwing ball													
POSITIVE STROKES .Hugs & kisses "Ilove you!" .Said nice things													
SCRIBBLING .watch child .commented .guided child													
PAINTING . helped .used fingers													
TALKING . school . T.V. prog.													
PRESENTING NEW IDEAS .new/different .project .plant/animal .cookies/table													
QUESTIONS .Asking .Answering													

APPENDIX C

RECORD OF READING ALOUD

DATE: _____ OBJECTIVE #2

READING ALOUD TO MY PRESCHOOL CHILD

Based on 15 minute intervals, 10 out of 15 parents will report orally on a day-by-day basis that they read aloud to their children at least three times per week, by the end of the twelve-week implementation period.

PARENT #	Week ___							Total	Week ___							Total	Week ___							Total	Week ___							Total
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S		S	M	T	W	T	F	S		S	M	T	W	T	F	S		S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
1																																
2																																
3																																
4																																
5																																
6																																
7																																
8																																
9																																
10																																
11																																
12																																
13																																
14																																
15																																

APPENDIX D

POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

Parent # _____ Objective # 3

PROMOTING POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

By the end of the implementation period, when given 20 randomly selected phrases describing positive, negative, or indifferent comments, at least 10 out of 15 parents will sort them into their correct category by placing "P" in front of positive comments, "I" in front of indifferent comments, and "N" in front of negative comments with 90% accuracy.

DIRECTIONS: Sort the following comments into the correct category. Place a "P" in front of the positive comments. Place an "I" in front of the comments that are neither negative nor positive. Place an "N" in front of comments which are negative.

____ Thank you!

____ I don't have time!

____ I love you!

____ Let's play a game together.

____ You are worring me. I'm tired.

____ You talk too much!

____ After I rest, we will make some pretty pictures.

____ Go and play with your brother!

____ We all make mistakes. Try again!

____ We'll do it later.

____ I hope your father comes to get you soon!

____ You always make a mess!

____ You did a nice job.

____ Go and watch T.V.!!

____ Stop asking all those questions

____ Yes, you may help me.

____ You can't do this.

____ Go to sleep, now!

____ How about tomorrow?

____ Mommy loves you.

____ Wait a minute!

____ Stop, because I said so!

APPENDIX E

RECORD OF LIBRARY MUSEUM

REPORTING FORM

DATE: _____ OBJECTIVE #4

LIBRARY/MUSEUM VISIT REPORTING FORM

By the end of the 12-week implementation period, 10 out of 15 parents will make at least 3 visits to the library, book store or museum to select materials or use the facility for materials that their children will enjoy as evidenced by oral self reporting on a weekly basis.

	Number of Visits for the 12-week Period Reported Weekly												
PARENT #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													
13													
14													
15													

APPENDIX F

CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPICAL PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

PARENT # _____ OBJECTIVE # 5

59

CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPICAL PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Put a check ✓ in front of each characteristic which describes a typical preschool child in the three categories.

PHYSICAL AGE	SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL AGE	COGNITIVE AGE
___ beginning use of scissors	___ likes to say "no"	___ remembers 3 or 4 step directions
___ colors inside the lines	___ enjoys group activity	___ asks lots of questions
___ clumsy, knocks things down	___ displays temper tantrums	___ adds and subtracts numerals
___ writes in manuscript and cursive form	___ wants to take turns	___ has a short attention span
___ can throw a ball and can catch a large ball	___ self-centered, thinks of self most times	___ likes to sing
___ enjoys fingerpainting and getting hands in things	___ cries a lot and is easily upset	___ begins to speak in sentences
___ easy to get tired and needs rest time	___ enjoys games that involve following the rules	___ wants to hear the same story read aloud many times

APPENDIX G

MERCHANT LETTER

_____Elementary School

Washington, D.C. 20009
March 21, 1990

Dear Merchant:

We have initiated a program at _____ Elementary School which involves working with parents of preschool youngsters in improving their parenting skills. This project will continue for twelve weeks at which time we hope to have accomplished many goals which would have a positive impact upon the learning of preschool pupils, through greater parental interactions.

All parents want the best for their children. As administrators and educators we want all children to reach their highest potential. We know that you as a business owner in the community want to help prepare children to experience success.

We ask your help in providing _____ for fifteen parents in the program. Your donation will serve as an incentive to help keep our parents and children involved. Please respond to Ms. Mary H. Jennings, Project Coordinator at (301) 864-6052 no later than April 1, 1991 concerning your participation.

Yours truly,

_____
Principal

Mary H. Jennings
Project Coordinator

Merchant Letter for donation of the following:
Film for taking pictures
Developing Film
Supplies for parents to use
Token incentives - small gifts for perfect attendance, responding to requests, etc.
Other incentives
Pizza Party
Closing Luncheon
Books for use with children

APPENDIX H

LOG OF UNEXPECTED EVENTS

Weekly Log Form

Date: / /

Date: / /